

Good afternoon Team DFCS,

For the last 6 weeks I have observed tremendous heroism and bravery in our staff as we dealt with the crisis caused by tornadoes. Individually, and collectively our staff has demonstrated an abiding and profound commitment to caring for Georgia families and our DHS family. As we wind down some of those efforts, I wanted to take just a moment for us to collectively focus on what we have lost and what we have gained as a result of this crisis and to reflect that onto our everyday interactions with one another and the families we serve. Many on our staff suffered devastating personal losses and some experienced injuries. We are so lucky that with a staff so large, no lives from our DHS family were lost. Our sister agency in Alabama was not so fortunate. We have all seen photographs of the devastation, which was unimaginable, yet this crisis helped coalesce our relationships with one another and with our communities. And, it has helped us plan for other potential disasters in the future. We move forward with strong ideas for policy and practice at times of crisis. We understand how to deploy help where most needed and how to continue to provide service to those in great need without the benefit of our physical plant.

During this same time period, I have experienced a personal tornado with critical illness in my family. I know this: on any given day, in any given town, someone you work with is experiencing a personal tornado as are most of the families you will see. And, it might just be you. None of us, after all, are immune to human crisis. Let us lift each other up as so many lifted the debris and ruin of the storms.

At the Division level, we are understaffed and overworked. I am painfully aware of the impact on staff of adjusting to new leadership, no matter the intentions of that leadership. I am further cognizant of the looming stressors of losing ARRA staff, a changing practice model and the accompanying technology evolution. I understand that this may be a tornado at work for some of you. My commitment to you is that changes will be well-considered, thorough and vetted. We will move forward united, organized and galvanized. We will make choices that make sense for all of Georgia and we will provide you with tools, training and guidance. What I ask of you is to remain the heroes for our clients and for each other that I know you to be and to recognize that our preeminent goal is to keep children safe. Georgia DFCS, your commitment is astounding. With just five months at the helm of this agency, I am amazed by how hard you struggle to make other peoples' lives better. I am honored to lead you at this incredible point in time, where we enjoy the support and goodwill of Commissioner Clyde Reese and are being allowed to focus on the real work at hand. Make no mistake, there have been and will be growing pains. We face massive budgetary and technological barriers to rolling out systems that will improve safety and permanency. Improvement will be a hard fought battle that we will win through perseverance and loyalty to this work.

Lastly, I am reminded daily of the sacrifices our personal families make because of this profession we have chosen. Prioritize your family, health and well-being. On any given day, in any given town, the difference in a life could be you. So my friends - take care of you.

Rachelle Carnesale, JD
DFCS Division Director